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NEW STANDARDS WOULD REFINE CHICAGO'S HIGH-RISE SIGN REGULATIONS

Regulations involving the size and placement of high-rise signs on tall Chicago buildings would become more predictable and consistent under a proposal introduced to City Council today by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD).

"We know that a company's ability to advertise its presence can be a big factor in its decision to locate in a specific building, or even within a specific city, so it's important for Chicago to keep its regulations consistent with the market -- without unduly cluttering the business card that is our skyline," said DPD Commissioner David Reifman.

A high-rise sign is a sign located at least 150 feet above the ground, according to the City's zoning code. Only one high-rise sign would continue to be allowed per building for a single, eligible tenant.

The new standards would retain the City's control over high-rise signs to ensure their size and scope are reasonable, compatible and well-designed additions to the skyline.

The primary change would establish a maximum size that is based exclusively on a sign's height above the ground. Currently, size limits are determined by a multiplier based on a building's width at the sign's location above the ground.

"The change to an incremental scale will establish a consistent, design-based perspective that will provide a reasonable and more uniform approach to the space occupied by letters and logos," said Reifman.

A sign's allowable size would increase at specific height thresholds to compensate for its diminished legibility at higher locations. At 800 feet or higher, the size would be capped at 1,100 square feet.

Proposed High-Rise Sign Limits	
Height of Sign (feet above grade at building base)	Maximum Area (square feet)
150 – 199	200
200 – 299	300
300 – 399	400
400 – 499	500
500 – 599	600
600 – 649	700
650 – 699	800
700 – 749	900
750 – 799	1,000
800 +	1,100

The new size calculations would also apply to the Chicago River Corridor Special Sign District, which currently has its own size calculations and other related signage restrictions for buildings adjacent to the waterway between Roosevelt Road and Lake Michigan.

No other changes would be made to the Chicago River Corridor Special Sign District, which will continue to prohibit flashing, neon, projecting, roof, painted and other intrusive signs along the waterway between Roosevelt Road and Lake Michigan.

Other changes would require:

- The sign to be located directly below a building’s roof line versus anywhere on the curtain wall, a restriction currently limited to the Chicago River Corridor Special Sign District.
- The sign not to exceed 50 percent of the building’s width, to preserve views of the building itself.
- The sign’s width to be no larger than its height, to prevent vertical signs from running down the face of a building.
- And for the sign to be well-integrated into the overall building design, as determined by the public entities that review new sign proposals, including local aldermen, the Zoning Board of Appeals, Chicago Plan Commission staff, and City Council.

The changes would also refine the criteria for a company to be eligible to have a high-rise sign at its business address and establish circumstances that require a sign to be removed. Currently, only a company that occupies at least 51 percent of a building’s leasable space is eligible, a threshold that’s largely unattainable for tenants of the city’s largest buildings. Under the proposal, companies that lease at least 350,000 square feet or employ more than 1,000 employees within a building would also be eligible. Companies would also have to annually certify that they are eligible to maintain a high-rise business identification sign.

The changes would not affect existing high-rise signs. The sizes of previously approved signs include the Marriott-Michigan Avenue at 1,403 square feet; Chase Tower at 1,149 square feet; Trump Tower at 2,891 square feet; and Nuveen at 709 square feet.

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